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Statement

by

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at

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Statement/Intervention limited to 8 min

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be here today to open this global workshop addressing the interactions between water, agriculture and climate change.

By 2050 some 60 percent more food is expected to be needed in order to feed the growing world population, while agriculture will continue to be the largest user of water globally, accounting in many countries for around two-thirds or more of supplies drawn from rivers, lakes and aquifers. On top of this, we are also already witnessing the brutal impacts of climate change such as increasing and more severe extreme weather events, like floods and droughts, impacting agricultural production, while the increase in temperatures will translate into higher water demand for irrigation.

In a world that is more and more connected and interdependent, the Covid-19 pandemic first, and the current war in Ukraine undid years of progress toward ending hunger and fuelled fear of an even greater food crisis, pummelling some of the world's most vulnerable people, countries and economies, and with possible detrimental consequences on the implementation of the entire 2030 Agenda.

Resolving the challenges of the near future requires a thorough reconsideration of how water is managed in the agricultural sector, and how it can be repositioned in the broader context of overall water resources management and water security.

Against this background, the importance of water cooperation is immediately evident considering that 60 per cent of the world's freshwater resources are shared by two or more countries. Transboundary water cooperation can help addressing problems such as water shortages for both people and productive activities, including

agriculture, through the reduction of over-abstraction and improved water allocations at basin level. Cooperation among riparian countries on transboundary early-warning systems can also minimize agricultural losses due to extreme weather events. Indeed, the last joint UNECE and UNESCO monitoring report of SDG indicator 6.5.2 in 2020 showed that agriculture has been reported to be part of the sectorial scope of 82 per cent of the transboundary water cooperation agreements.

Nevertheless, still too many transboundary basins lack the necessary cooperation frameworks to manage these resources sustainably. Only 24 countries worldwide have all their transboundary waters covered by operational arrangements for water cooperation. The SDG indicator 6.5.2 monitoring report, based on 129 country replies, clearly shows that in order to reach the transboundary water cooperation targets in the 2030 Agenda, we need to more than quadruple progress on transboundary water cooperation.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, known as the Water Convention, which UNECE has the honour to service, is a powerful global instrument to advance cooperation. Since its adoption 30 years ago, the Water Convention has significantly advanced transboundary water cooperation in the pan-European region and has been opened to all United Nations Member States in 2016, with more and more countries expressing interest in acceding and engaging in its future activities. Five African countries have already acceded to it and more than 130 take part in its meetings and activities. I call on other countries to join the Water Convention.

To improve water, food, and also energy security through regional cooperation the Water Convention facilitates transboundary dialogue across the “nexus” sectors. To do so, we have developed a methodology to analyse these

complex interlinkages through participatory assessments. This has supported dialogue and spurred action in several basins, including the North-Western Saharan Aquifer System, where the issue of food security and agricultural livelihoods is truly central. In this case, for instance, riparian countries jointly developed a “package” of nexus solutions to tackle issues of groundwater depletion in a more coordinated way, ranging from increasing awareness in public institutions of trade-offs and synergies between different sectors to the set-up of dedicated policies and incentives for wastewater reuse in agriculture and the enhancement of innovation for sustainable soil and crop management.

We know that cross-sectoral cooperation is particularly important in the face of climate change, which is calling us to take much bolder action, and in all our economies and societies. Our nexus and climate change work aim at taking the national, municipal and local efforts of mitigation and adaptation one step further, on a regional scale, through better and stronger transboundary cooperation. In fact, transboundary cooperation is crucial to make adaptation more effective, like the integrated approach to flood and drought management and early warning systems in the Volta Basin and other good examples we will hear in this workshop can demonstrate.

These and other good practices will be discussed in the coming days. We will hear and learn from the experiences of countries, river basin organisations, financial institutions and other UN agencies and bodies working to develop climate resilience in water and agriculture.

This workshop will be followed by the meeting of the Water Convention’s Task Force on water and climate, aiming to discuss input to the COP27.

I encourage you to bring the key messages from these three days discussion to the next COP27 happening in Sharm El Sheikh in less than a month, where water, agriculture and nature-based solution will be high on the agenda, and to the 2023 UN water conference to be held in New York on 22-24 March 2023. The three inter-related topics of agriculture, climate change and transboundary cooperation are expected to be discussed in the interactive dialogues at that occasion. UNECE is committed to join forces with all relevant actors to promote transboundary cooperation and climate resilience through water at the conference.

To conclude, I would like to thank the Parties to the Water Convention, non-Parties and all donors, basin organizations and partners that will be with us in the next days and supported in the organisation of this workshop and of the Task Force meeting.

Thank you.